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ABSTRACT

This monograph focuses on adult education programs and (1) why needs assessment is necessary, (2) how to assess needs, (3) how to assess the needs of special groups, and (4) how to assess program needs. In the first of four sections the administrator's role is described, and the term "needs" is defined. Models are proposed for individual and institutional behavior. Section 2 reviews three assumptions as to why the assessment is being conducted; for example, the first assumption is that a needs assessment process leads to program support. This section advances an eight-step process for assessing needs: identify program goals, identify needed data, identify data available, identify data that must be gathered, gather data, identify discrepancies, rank order identified discrepancies, and begin the program development process. How to gather and manage data are also examined. Section 3 focuses on the needs of specific adults. It is suggested that criteria, such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, handicaps, and educational status, can be used to identify program requirements for various subgroups. The involvement of community agencies in meeting special group needs is recommended. The report cautions against involvement with vested interests and notes particular problems in obtaining data from certain subgroups. The final section advises the use of the eight-step model to identify program needs. (CSS)

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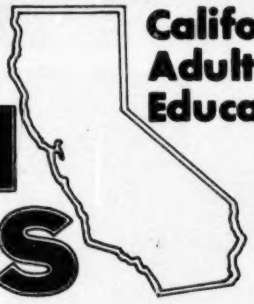
NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS



California Adult Education

A LEADERSHIP MONOGRAPH

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1978

Preface

For a number of years, directors and teachers of adult education in California, like those in other educational programs, have realized the value of assessing needs, prioritizing the needs, and then stating them as goals and objectives. Adult educators, possibly more than their colleagues in other specialties, have been keenly aware of the importance of responding to local needs. Unlike the elementary and secondary education programs, adult education is not mandated by law; therefore, it exists only if the unique needs of the community can be identified.

Although much progress has been made in implementing needs assessments in adult education programs in school districts throughout the state, further improvement is needed in the adoption of needs assessment techniques. This monograph, entitled *Needs Assessment in Adult Education Programs,* is intended to provide new ideas which can be adapted by adult educators to the unique conditions in their communities.

To those teachers who contributed most of the material for this monograph, we wish to express our gratitude for a job well done. Our appreciation is also extended to Robert Williams, Oakland Unified School District, who assumed responsibility for drafting the monograph. We hope the many dedicated adult educators in the field find this document useful in shaping the future of the programs in their adult schools.

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Introduction

Adult education programs throughout the country have experienced a rapid growth over the past ten years. This growth is particularly evident in California, where many programs have doubled and tripled in size. The growth has been stimulated by such factors as an economic recession, financial incentives to school districts, increased leisure time, and rising expectations of employers regarding the skill and training levels of employees.

People have reacted to the expansion of adult education programs in different ways. First, those who have been involved in adult education applaud as their programs reach fruition. Others question the validity of the expenditure of public funds for the education of adults. Some look at the financial impact of the program growth and question the advisability of that growth. Finally, there are those who accept the growth as a positive trend but question the random nature of the growth.

In many instances the growth of adult education has been disjointed and reactive. Many program administrators seem to assume that, because they are busy or the program is growing, the program is responsive to needs on a priority basis. This assumption does not appear to be supported by the almost knee-jerk reaction that has been in evidence in many adult education programs. A request, a demand, and a little bit of pressure can lead to the immediate establishment of a course. And too often supportive evidence is not available for use in justifying the course.

Adult education programs operate with limited resources. When the adult education decision makers are given those limited resources, they must be sure that they put them to the best uses. The simple knee-jerk reaction must be suspect, because such a reaction may be crisis oriented or may be strictly emotional. If the resources are to be used most efficiently and effectively, the adult education program must be developed in an orderly and knowledgeable fashion.

Adult education, perhaps more than any other type of education, is responsive and flexible. Therefore, because it is so responsive and flexible, the decision-making process must have a firm data base for program growth and expansion. Data must be gathered with regard to the needs of the community for continuing education, the needs of adults for such education, and the needs of the adult education program in meeting community and adult needs. This type of assessment can provide a data base for decision making and subsequent action and for program justification.

Adult educators no longer can sit in their offices and quietly go about their business. Adult education programs have become highly visible to the politicians, to the taxpayers, and to the public at large. Questions are being asked about the nature of adult education programs. These questions, however inappropriate they may seem to the adult education administrator, must be answered. The burden of answering these questions rests with the administrator who is responsible for the program. The administrator can answer the questions satisfactorily only if he or she can demonstrate that the program is meeting the essential needs of the people and of the community.

The adult education administrator should be the first person to question the nature of the growth of the program, the bases for decisions about the program, and the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of its clientele. A needs assessment process must be built into the very fabric of the adult education program to ensure that the administrator discharges his or her responsibilities appropriately.

The Why of Needs Assessment

The why of needs assessment is the most critical aspect of the whole process. Meaningful data collection and data analysis can be instituted only when adult education administrators, staff, students, and the community at large are in agreement as to why a needs assessment process should be implemented. Generating consensus on why the process should be instituted is not an easy task. A consensus is necessary, however, if (1) needs assessment activities are to provide reliable and valid data; and (2) subsequent decisions on program priorities are to be accepted by the consumers and the deliverers.

Administrator's Role

The administrator may be keenly aware of the need for an assessment process. However, others in the community may not share that awareness. The awareness that impinges upon the administrator may come from a variety of sources. He or she may be struggling with the problems of a limited budget. He or she may be in the position of having to respond to community groups, to the board of education, and to other district decision makers to justify the program and the budget. He or she may have to decide which requests for adult education offerings will be supported. If the administrator is to obtain support for the program, he or she must have data at hand that justify the decisions he or she makes about the program.

The need for a needs assessment in a local adult education program may not always be apparent to the local program administrator. He or she has many demanding responsibilities in the day-to-day operation of an instructional program. The administrator has to decide whether to defer some of these tasks so that he or she can direct his or her time and energy to a needs assessment process. In the long run the administrator, by directing his or her time and energy to a needs assessment process, may obviate the necessity for him or her to spend so much time in making the day-to-day decisions. The administrator will then have a better understanding of the desired long-range direction of the program. He or she will be able to make decisions that are based upon the desired direction.

Definition of Needs

For the purpose of this discussion a need is defined as a discrepancy between a desired direction or condition and a current condition. A discrepancy exists when a current state of being, or state of affairs, is not congruent with an ideal state of being, or state of affairs. The ideal state of being is usually socially prescribed as a desired condition.

Model for Individual Behavior

Basic to the needs satisfaction process is the assumption that all behavior is directed to satisfying a need. This assumption applies to the behavior of individuals as well as to the behavior of institutions. The behavior of institutions is reflected in the programs and services they provide.

At any point in time there may be a series of requirements that impinge upon a person or an institution. These requirements are often equated with developmental tasks or basic needs. They are dependent upon cultural and personal factors and are related to maturation and motivation. The requirements could include such things as understanding and accepting self, understanding relationships with others, structuring a value orientation acceptable to self and others, acquiring basic skills of social competence, and acquiring basic skills of intellectual competence. They are felt by a person either directly or indirectly. A person may not be aware of what the basic pressures are, but he or she does respond to these pressures. The response is a recognition of a need awareness.

The need awareness impinges upon the individual who is engaged in constant interaction with figures (persons and institutions) in the environment. The individual responds to such figures as parents, peers, the community at large, teachers, counselors, and so forth. The manner in which the individual receives and responds to the expectations of these significant figures in his or her environment will, to a large extent, determine the

intensity of the need awareness. To satisfy that need the individual must make a decision.

All actions are usually preceded by a decision-making process. Further, all action and behavior are directed to the satisfaction of needs. But behavior may not satisfy a need without creating additional needs, unless attention is given to the alternatives and the consequences of following each alternative. For example, a student who responds to parental pressure for a high achievement in school may use a devious means to get a good grade on an examination. The consequences of the action may create further needs that are far more difficult to satisfy than the original need to which he or she was responding. The most effective action is one that meets needs with minimal creation of further needs.

Once the student acts and behaves, he or she then starts to evaluate his or her behavior. Evaluation is based on the effectiveness with which the need is satisfied. The evaluation process may require feedback from others to (1) clarify the meanings and the effectiveness with which the need is satisfied; and (2) to clarify the meanings and the effectiveness of the particular action taken. The student will then make changes in his or her responses and behavior in accordance with the extent of need satisfaction achieved by the previous action. This process becomes cyclical, and the student becomes engaged in a continual behavior modification process, which is presented in schematic form in Figure 1.

Model for Institutional Behavior

The behaviors of the individual can be applied to the behaviors of an institution as it attempts to meet various needs. Institutional goals can be substituted in the place of life requirements. Those goals could include such things as facilitating individual growth, providing experiences to develop effective interpersonal relations, providing experiences to develop skills in decision making, providing experiences to develop skills in economic proficiency, providing experiences to develop skills in intellectual competency, and providing experiences to develop social competency. The institution, like the individual in the previous schema, responds to those expectations and goals in an environment composed of forces with differing expectations of the institution. The forces might consist of the economic community, the social community, the labor community, the family community, the religious community, and the institution's staff. Again, the institution, like the individual, must make a decision, which is a response to a need. The institution then acts on the basis of the decision. The action is evaluated by the institution and by the various forces surrounding the institution. Based upon the effectiveness with which the institution perceives the extent of needs satisfaction resulting from the elected action, institutional behavior modification is then put into effect. The process of institutional behavior directed to need satisfaction is presented in schematic form in Figure 2.

Uses of Needs Assessment Data

Data derived from a needs assessment process have three major uses. First, they can be used as baseline data for decision making. Decisions regarding program priorities and program activities can be made on the basis of needs being satisfied by such program decisions. Second, needs assessment data may be used as baseline data for eventual program evaluation. Follow-up data from program participants can be used to determine the extent to which the various student needs expected to be met by program activities are actually met. Follow-up studies may also generate needs data which can then be used to modify or build programs. Third, needs assessment data can be used to generate responses to program critics and detractors.

Education has moved from the sacrosanct ivory tower to the public arena where people ask many diverse questions. Education is no longer able to rest on the premise that it is intrinsically good whatever form it takes. The public is demanding and has the right to receive answers to such questions as the following:

1. Why are we spending our money for adult education?
2. What kind of organizational structures in adult education are the most efficient?
3. What immediate impact does adult education have on students?
4. What long-range impact will the program have on students?
5. To what extent is the adult education program meeting the primary need of the adult population?
6. What instructional strategies are most effective with what kinds of adult education students?
7. How can we get the most for our dollar in adult education?

These questions are also being asked by persons outside the immediate adult education program. Some direct actions have been taken by the

Legislature regarding the appropriateness and adequacy of adult education programs. Decisions are being made for adult education administrators. These decisions will become increasingly critical. The extent to which the adult education administrators can provide answers on a consistent, reliable basis may well determine the future of adult education in California.

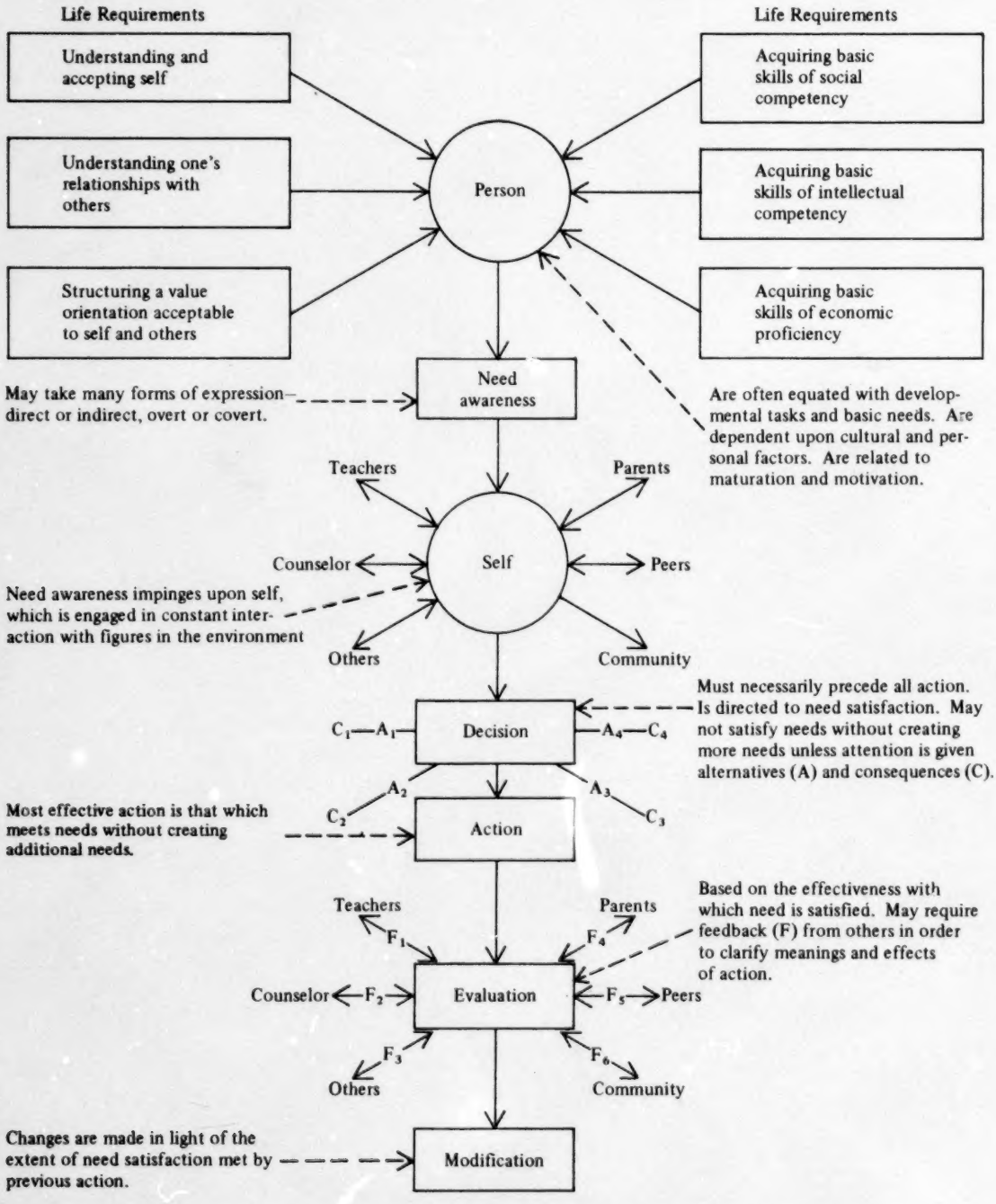
Life Requirements
Understanding and accepting self
Understanding one's relationships with others
Structuring a value orientation acceptable to self and others
Life Requirements
Acquiring basic skills of social competency
Acquiring basic skills of intellectual competency
Acquiring basic skills of economic proficiency
Person
Need awareness
May take many forms of expression—direct or indirect, overt or covert.
Are often equated with developmental tasks and basic needs. Are dependent upon cultural and personal factors. Are related to maturation and motivation.
Teachers
Parents
Counselor
Self
Peers
Others
Community
Need awareness impinges upon self, which is engaged in constant interaction with figures in the environment
Must necessarily precede all action. Is directed to need satisfaction. May not satisfy needs without creating more needs unless attention is given alternatives (A) and consequences (C).
C1—A1
Decision
A4—C4
A2
C2
A3
C3
Most effective action is that which meets needs without creating additional needs.
Action
Teachers
Parents
F1
F4
Based on the effectiveness with which need is satisfied. May require feedback (F) from others in order to clarify meanings and effects of action.
Counselor
F2
Evaluation
F5
Peers
F3
F6
Others
Community
Changes are made in light of the extent of need satisfaction met by previous action.
Modification

Figure 1. Individual Needs Satisfaction and the Process of Behavior Modification

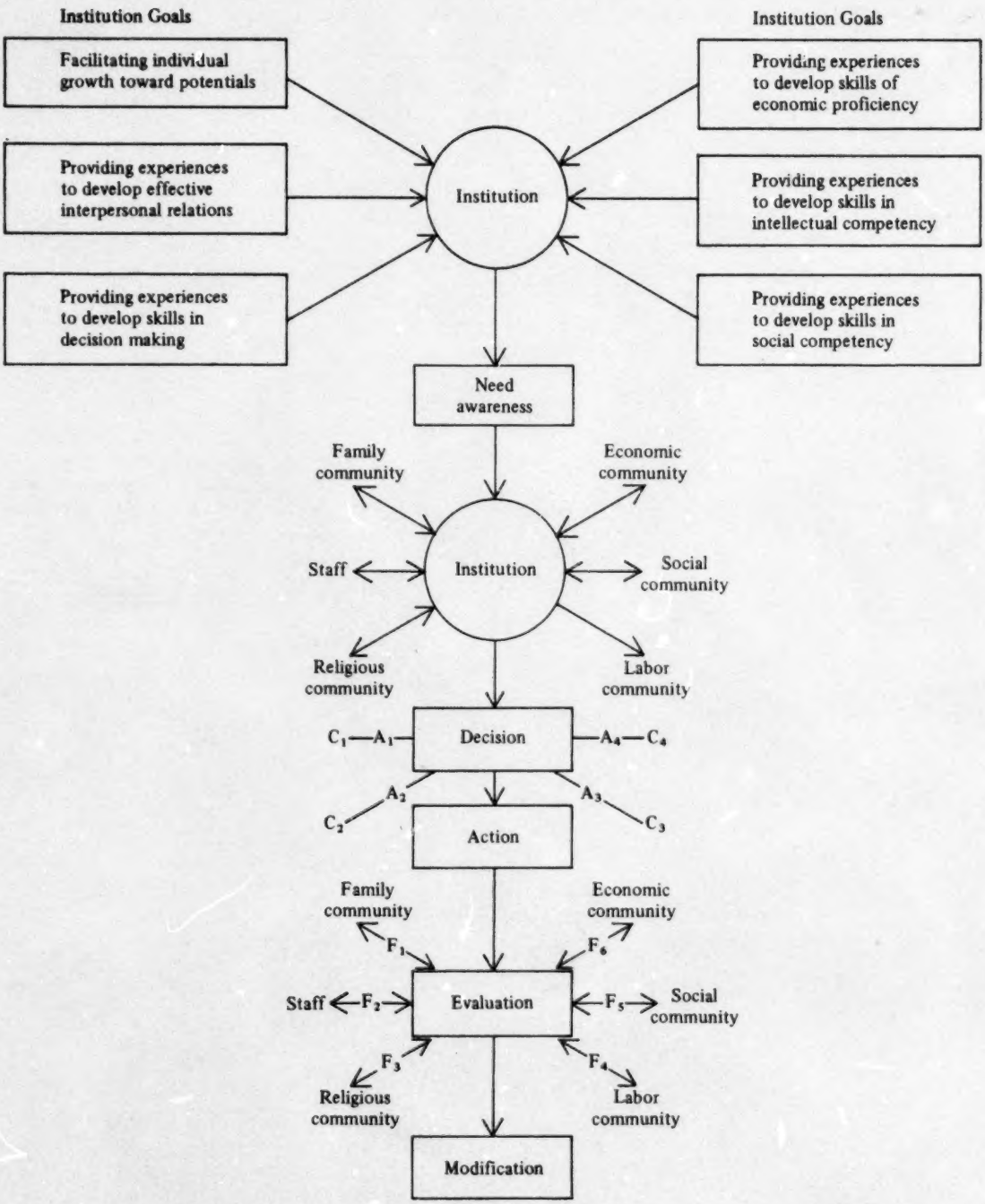

Figure 2. Institutional Needs Satisfaction and the Process of Behavior Modification

The How of Needs Assessment

The specific procedures for collecting data are usually uppermost in the minds of people when they first think about the process of assessing needs. However, these procedures are only a part of the total process. Data are of relatively little value unless they have been gathered for a specific purpose. The needs assessment process must be preceded by an understanding and acceptance of why the assessment is being conducted. The assumptions and implications discussed in the following section are basic to the needs assessment process and must be understood.

Assumptions and Implications

Assumption number one is that involvement in a needs assessment process leads to program support. The implication of this assumption is that the needs assessment process should involve a broad range of participants. The participants should include staff, students, the community at large (the economic community, the social community, and the governmental community), and any other particular group identified by the adult education program leaders as having an interest in or a concern for the adult education program.

Assumption number two is that the needs assessment process is derived from a statement of program philosophy and goals. The implication of this assumption is rather clear. A statement of program philosophy and goals should be clearly delineated. The statement of philosophy and goals provides the overall parameters within which the adult education program operates. Without such a statement it is possible that data gathered through a needs assessment process would be scattered, haphazard, and only mildly related to the adult education program.

Assumption number three is that needs assessment data are always related to time and context limitations. The implication of this assumption is that the needs assessment process should be an ongoing activity, because the data derived are always limited by the particular economic, social, or political situation existing at the time the data are gathered. This assumption also precludes data generated from a specific needs assessment activity used as a program basis over a long period of time. The very nature of the data is limited by time, space, and situational variables.

How to Assess Needs

The needs assessment process consists of eight steps. These steps are as follows:

1. Identify program goals.
2. Identify needed data.
3. Identify data available.
4. Identify data that must be gathered.
5. Gather data.
6. Identify discrepancies.
7. Rank order identified discrepancies.
8. Begin the process of program development.

Each of the above steps is considered in greater detail in the following sections.

Identify Program Goals

A statement of program philosophy and goals is the starting point for the needs assessment process. This process will be enhanced considerably by the clarity and specificity of the statement and its acceptance by the community. However, reaching a consensus or an agreement on such a statement is not an easy step. If support is to be obtained for the statement of program philosophy and goals, a process involving a broad range of community participants must be used. When such broad input is used, differences will be voiced among the various program definers. These differences must be resolved before a broad support base can be achieved.

Total agreement is virtually impossible to reach among a group representing the broad spectrum of interests in adult education. However, a level of consensus is possible within such a group so that there is general acceptance of the final statements. Reaching such a level of consensus takes longer than it would by the use of a majority vote. However, the additional time required to reach a

consensus will result in greater support for the program goals.

Identify Needed Data

To make the needs assessment process efficient and appropriate, a consensus must be reached regarding the data that will be needed. If, for example, one of the institutional goals is to provide experiences to develop skills in economic proficiency, data would be needed regarding the extent of such skills of adults in the community. Since the adult education program is located within a particular community, it might also be necessary to determine, using job market survey data, the extent to which the vocational skills of the adults are related to employment opportunities within the community. Unemployment rates, job turnover rates, employment department data regarding skills of applicants, and data from industry regarding skills of job applicants and present employees are all examples of the kinds of data that might be needed.

Identify Data Available

People are usually not aware of the additional data that are available within most communities. These data may be scattered in places such as the chamber of commerce and the employment department. They also may be found in industry surveys, studies by other educational institutions, and studies by governmental agencies. These data sources are available to the adult education decision maker.

Identify Data That Must Be Gathered

After steps two and three above have been accomplished, it is a relatively simple process to identify those data that must be gathered to provide the full range of data needed for decision making. The available data are matched with the data that are needed to determine the data that must be gathered.

Gather Data

A great deal of emphasis, perhaps too much emphasis, is placed on the data gathering process in most needs assessment statements. Administrators can become involved in a very detailed, highly technical data gathering process. If the data can be used in the program after it has been gathered, then the process may be appropriate. Generally, however, data gathering is a relatively simple process if the first four steps detailed above have been completed.

Data gathering methods fall within three categories: inquiry, observation, and review. The *inquiry process* usually consists of asking, which may involve activities such as interviewing, testing, and circulating questionnaires. The *observation process* involves looking at what is transpiring. If data are needed regarding the unemployment situation, observers can simply circulate throughout the community and observe the number of adults who appear to be unemployed. Problems are associated with this kind of process, but the data gathered through observation, in conjunction with data from other processes, can provide a valid overview of unemployment in the community. The *review process* is simply looking at what data are already available. Students' records, census data, employment department data, government surveys, and data from other agencies are usually available to adult education administrators. These data need to be gathered and reviewed to complement data gathered through the inquiry and the observation processes.

Identify Discrepancies

The needs assessment process also involves the comparison of *what is* with *what should be. What is* comes from step five, "Gather Data." *What should be* is derived from step one, "Identify Program Goals." The process is not difficult, but too often this step is not considered in the needs assessment process.

Rank Order Identified Discrepancies

After the discrepancies between *what is* and *what should be* have been identified, the adult education administrators must then rank order the discrepancies. This step is difficult because each of the different programs is represented by elements of the community which hold expectations of the program and which operate from their own points of view. The involvement of these people is essential to the eventual support of the program by the community.

Begin Program Development Process

The program development process is greatly facilitated by the needs assessment process. Priority needs are identified because they are generally supported by the community. A support base for the eventual programs is established, and lines of communication are opened between program consumers and program deliverers. These conditions make the program development process responsive and open.

How to Gather Data

As previously noted, the data gathering phase of the needs assessment process can be overemphasized, and the data gathering methods can be grouped under the categories of inquiry, observation, and review. The important fact to keep in mind is that the data must be reliable and must be gathered in a systematic manner. The administrator should also keep in mind that the ways in which the data are used will partially determine the ways in which they are gathered.

The inquiry category includes those data gathering methods which are usually associated with a study. Questionnaires, survey forms, and opinionnaires are instruments in common use. The technical problems associated with them include questions about sampling, item validity, bias, and scaling, all of which must be dealt with. The responses may lead to erroneous conclusions. However, such instruments do provide a means of gathering data from a large number of respondents with comparative ease. These data, in conjunction with data gathered by other means, can be of use to the administrator and to others making decisions. The instruments can be mailed to a selected population, they can be delivered by youth groups, they can be distributed at meetings, or they can be made available in libraries or at shopping centers.

Another inquiry method for gathering data is the interview. Staff or volunteers can be trained to gather data through the use of an interview schedule, which consists of a set of questions that have been carefully developed to elicit needed data. Visiting teams of interviewers can be deployed throughout the community on a planned basis to visit homes and businesses. Interviews can also be held with current students.

Community meetings can also be used to provide needs data. These meetings can be set up for the purpose of discussing adult education and ways in which it can meet the needs of the adults and the community. They can also consist of regular meetings of churches, civic organizations, or community-based organizations, in which the agenda includes a discussion of the adult education program. These meetings should be recorded, either by using observer-recorders or by tape recording the proceedings, for analysis at a later time.

The observation category can range from a simple drive around the community to the use of highly trained individuals who do detailed recordings of what they see. Local newspapers, business directories, annual reports of industries and agencies, and local radio and television shows can provide data about community needs.

The review category involves using existing data sources as a basis for assessing individual and community needs. Some of the more obvious sources in this category are census reports, employment department data and projections, reports prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, school district reports, chamber of commerce reports, and other studies conducted by community and governmental agencies.

The administrator should exercise a certain amount of caution when using any of the previously discussed data gathering methods. He or she should clearly establish at the outset of the data gathering effort what kinds of data are being sought, so that the researcher's time and effort are not wasted. With the plethora of data that are available from various sources, adult administrators will often have more data than can be used or data that are not relevant to the needs assessment process.

How to Manage Data

Once the data have been gathered, the administrator must cope with the problem of how to manage them. The management of data may not be a problem if (1) steps one and two of the needs assessment process are carefully done; and (2) the form in which the data are to be gathered is clearly specified. Steps one and two of the process ensure that the data gathering function focuses upon relevant data. Attention to the form of the data ensures that the data can be more easily analyzed, either by hand or by the use of today's computer technology.

The definition of need as a discrepancy between *what is* and *what should be* lends itself to a relatively simple data analysis process. Data that identify *what should be* are compared with data that identify *what is*. The process can be compared to a basic subtraction problem; i.e, *what should be* minus *what is* equals *needs*. If, for example, one of the program goals is to ensure that adults have the basic skills for economic proficiency and it is determined that the ability to complete a job application is one of these basic skills, it would be possible to work with employers and with current students to gather data that identify the extent to which adults can complete job applications. Three independent judges could be used to rate a sample of job applications taken from the two sources previously noted. Each application would be rated as satisfactory or unsatisfactory by inter-judge agreement. The *what should be* is 100 percent of

the applications rated as satisfactory. The *what is* is the percent of applications rated as satisfactory. The *need* is identified by subtracting the *what is* percent from the *what should be* percent. This example, while perhaps an oversimplification, reflects the general idea of gathering data, rating those data as either positive or negative, and then using a subtraction process to identify the extent of need.

More complicated data analysis techniques can be used. Parametric or nonparametric statistics can be generated from the data that are gathered. The local administrator should make sure that the particular analysis technique to be used is specified prior to the collection of data. A specification will then be used to determine the most appropriate form in which the data are to be gathered.

Although the more complicated data analysis techniques provide more sophisticated results, they also require either a greater sophistication on the part of the consumer or an explanatory narrative in concise, nonstatistical language.

Assessing the Needs of Special Groups

The introductory section of this monograph noted that a data base is needed from three categories for making decisions: the community; the adults; and the adult education program. This section focuses on the needs of specific adults. The needs of all adults for continuing education are too general to be manageable in a needs assessment study of most adult education programs. A global assessment of the needs of all adults for continuing education would create a mass of data that would be unmanageable unless the program had extensive resources such as personnel and data processing equipment. Even a global assessment would have to include, for purposes of identifying program requirements, subgroups of overall population. The general population can be categorized by using criteria such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational status, and other criteria, including handicaps.

Involvement of the Community

The implementation of an effective and efficient needs assessment process should, as noted before, include the involvement of community agencies or organizations. When the program deals with specific subgroups from the overall population, it is necessary to include those agencies and organizations that address the particular constituency under study. Involvement of community groups in this way can have three consequences. First, the program will include those groups which define their expectations of the adult education program. Their expectations will determine, to a large extent, the statements of what kinds of data will be needed. Second, the use of the groups will also provide access to data already collected on the adults being studied and access to those adults who are included in the category. Third, the use of community groups will provide input from interested parties as the process of establishing program priorities is carried out.

Cautions for Studies

Several cautions should be raised at this point in regard to the needs assessment process that divides the assessment into studies of subgroups. Since all of the possible groups are not being studied, it is possible that certain vested interests could be given more emphasis than they deserve within the context of the overall adult education program. Another caution is that the adult education program should not become a forum for voicing political concerns. Unfortunately, it is quite easy for the needs assessment process to be exploited by groups who wish to promote their visibility as political entities in the community. Every care should be taken to ensure that the data being collected are specifically and directly related to the educational needs of the adults in the group under study.

A spin-off effect does result from the involvement of community agencies that represent the groups in the study. Cooperative ventures are more easily developed when staff are used cooperatively, and there is a sharing of resources. This kind of cooperative venture strengthens the acceptance of the program and the agency representing the adults being studied.

Particular Problems

Certain subgroups within the community sometimes present particular problems in the needs assessment process. The usual approach is to go directly to the adults in the groups and seek information from them regarding their needs. In some cases the direct approach is not possible without special accommodations. If the group is monolingual, non-English speaking, then the data collecting activities must accommodate that characteristic. People who speak the language must be used to collect the data. These groups also may not be literate in their own language, thus obviating the practicality of a questionnaire. The interview is then used as the primary data source in the direct approach.

In other subgroups such as the aged, physically handicapped, or emotionally handicapped, it may not be possible to secure valid or reliable data without making accommodations. Persons who assess needs must identify all potential subgroups and must plan accordingly.

Assessing the Needs of the Program

The same eight-step model which was developed in this monograph for the assessment of the educational needs of specific groups of adults and the adult community at large can be applied to the assessment of the programmatic needs of adult education. Once educational priorities have been established and activities have been directed to those priorities, the program can be examined in terms of its needs. Again, the definition of needs is the discrepancy between *what is* and *what should be.*

Various goals of adult education can be identified by the program managers and by the community served by the program. For example, one of the goals might be to provide inservice staff development activities to ensure that teaching staff have skills that will enable them to perform the teaching tasks identified in the program development process. This goal raises two questions: What skills do teachers need? What skills do teachers have? The discrepancy between the skills needed and the skills possessed equals the need – the skills that must be developed. It may not be possible to provide activities to develop all of the skills at the same time. A decision will have to be made in regard to the priorities placed upon the skills that must be developed. Once these priorities have been established, a staff development program can be directed to the identified priority needs.

Another example of the application of the model to the assessment of the needs of the program could be in the area of facilities. A program goal might be to provide appropriate adult education facilities. The data needed might be in regard to what kind of facilities will provide the best learning environment, including such criteria as location, access to public transportation, size, and equipment. The available data could consist of existing surveys of facilities, reports from the school districts on available facilities, and any information from other agencies or organizations in regard to usable facilities. Data to be gathered would be primarily information on facilities that are available for adult education activities. When the number of facilities needed is determined, plans can be established to acquire or develop such facilities.

Summary

This monograph has focused mainly on (1) the why of needs assessment; (2) how to assess needs; (3) the needs of special groups; and (4) the needs of the program. No particular needs assessment process has been cited because the process differs from case to case. The only limitation upon ways in which data are gathered is the creativity and ingenuity of the adult education staff. The data must be gathered in a reliable and consistent manner and must relate to the adult education program. The conclusions drawn from the data must relate to educational needs.

The needs assessment process is an ongoing process. As noted previously, data that are gathered at one point in time should not be used as continuing criteria for evaluating the program. The needs assessment process is continuous, responding to constantly emerging unmet needs.

Once the needs assessment process is established as a continuing function, the process becomes the decision-making base. Any deviation from the process leaves the program administrator open to questions. The process should not become so rigid that it precludes the responsiveness that is the strength of adult education. However, the program administrator must recognize that he or she should have a very strong justification for deviating from the process as a decision-making base.

Perhaps an anticipatory mode of behavior should be developed by adult education administrators. They must look beyond today's needs. They must anticipate the needs of tomorrow by using the best data available. These long-range projections will enable adult education to provide relevant programs which truly serve the needs of the student and the community.

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